



TO MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE:

As academic researchers and residents of Connecticut, we are writing to inform you of the state of the research on the issue of menu labeling. Poor diet is a major public health problem, contributing not only to obesity, but other medical problems such as Type II diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, and some cancers. Efforts to improve the public's diet will benefit every resident of the state of Connecticut.

One factor that has been identified as a potential contributor to the deterioration of the American diet is an increase in eating food away from home. Here are findings from some key research studies:

- Americans are **consuming more food outside the home** than ever before. In 2004, the away from home food market accounted for **half** of the total food expenditures, reflecting an increase from 34% in 1974.
- Foods consumed outside of the home tend to be higher in calories and nutritionally poorer than foods prepared in one's home. Also, the **portion sizes** of restaurant meals have grown substantially over the previous decades. One study showed that the average children's restaurant meal has **twice as many calories** as a child's meal eaten at home.
- It has been shown that consumers lack accurate knowledge about the calorie and fat content in restaurant menu items (Burton et al., 2006). People tend to systematically **underestimate** the calorie and fat content of foods. One study found that *even dieticians* underestimated the calorie content of commonly consumed foods by up to 48% (Backstrand et al., 1997).

We did our own study of children's meals a few years ago and found the following calories in **children's menu items** at these restaurants:

- Outback **1069** calories 31 g fat
- Red Lobster **1058** calories 39 g fat
- Pizza Hut **1013** calories 27 g fat
- Taco Bell **936** calories 38 g fat
- Applebee's **689** calories 27 g fat
- KFC **680** calories 24 g fat
- McDonalds **640** calories 27 g fat
- Denny's **638** calories 25 g fat

The research here is clear - people eat too many calories when they are out at restaurants - and they don't realize it. **Americans want more nutrition information - at the time when they can use it.**

- **Public opinion polls find that most Americans, ranging from 62% to 83% in various polls, are in favor of a law requiring nutrition information on restaurant menus.**

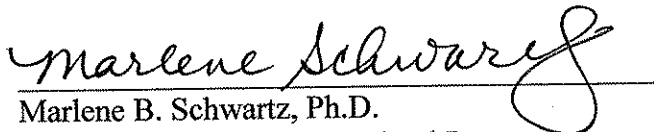
As public health professionals, we believe the available science suggests that nutrition information must be clear, present, in as many restaurants as possible, and readily apparent to consumers. Gathering information on a website, or getting the notebook from the manager in the back of the store is not a realistic option. People need to know the calories, just like they know the price, so they can decide what they can afford to eat - both in terms of money and calories.

It is hard to imagine making progress on improving dietary choice without consumers being fully informed about their options. Thank you for considering this matter,

Sincerely,



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